

Retaining Staff Nurses in North Carolina

Findings from the 2001 Survey of Staff Nurses in North Carolina

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An effective strategy for fighting the nursing shortage is to reduce turnover rates for staff nurses. Not only does this save employers tens of thousands of dollars in turnover costs, but it also means the difference between an experienced staff and one made up of a larger percentage of new hires that may be less experienced and unfamiliar with the organization's policies and procedures. One way employers can reduce turnover and increase retention is to understand which aspects of organizational culture and policy help to keep nurses on the payroll. The present report provides an overview of the reasons given by staff nurses for staying with the same employer for more than five years. This study will also examine the relationships between the reasons nurses stay and employment setting, a nurse's length of tenure in a job, nurse perceptions of short staffing in their organization, and nurses' satisfaction with work. The report will conclude with a review and comparison of what employers in North Carolina believe are effective retention programs.

This report is part of a larger study of staff nurses that explores their feelings about their work environments and their plans for staying in or leaving the workforce. During the summer of 2001, the North Carolina Center for Nursing surveyed staff nurses licensed and employed in North Carolina. Both RN and LPN staff nurses were randomly selected from the three geographic regions of the state based on their home address in the license renewal files maintained by the North Carolina Board of Nursing as of April 1, 2001. A total of 713 usable surveys were returned for an overall response rate of 63%.¹ The tables in this report focus on North Carolina staff nurses' reasons for staying with the same employer for more than five years. Additional reports will be made available that explore other topics covered by the study.

To meet the definition of staff nurse used in this study, the respondents must have been employed in nursing at the time they completed the survey, providing direct patient care as part of their nursing position, and employed in the following kinds of positions: staff nurse / general duty nurse, office nurse, home care nurse, or charge nurse / team leader. However, they could be employed in any type of setting. All of the staff nurses included in the analysis in this report had been employed in their current primary nursing position for five years or more at the time of the survey.

The individual employment settings named by staff nurses can be summarized into three types: hospital in-patient units, residential nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities, and community settings (such as doctors' offices, public health departments, and occupational health sites). Table 1 presents information on the type of employment setting, and the length of job tenure for the RN and LPN staff nurses in the study sample and in the analysis group for this report.